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From the cover: Frank Adams' president, COO brings in the family

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Kimberly Adams Russell on the September/October 2013 cover of Women@Work.

Sometime in March, Kimberly Adams Russell received the news that her client's order would not arrive in time for the date he needed it by — his wife's last day at work before retirement. The gift, a ring custom made in Italy, was delayed due to the coronavirus pandemic, while Frank Adams Jewelers was temporarily closed for the same reason.

As a jewelry store fast approaching its 100th anniversary, it's pretty easy for Russell and her team to make someone's day — or month or year — under normal circumstances. But this presented a unique challenge to deliver on the promise of making one of life's most important moments as memorable as possible.

So, when Russell called her client to share an update, she already had the solution. There was a sample of the made-to-order ring at the shop, which Russell could use to share with her client's wife in a special virtual presentation on the day of her retirement.

“She had just gotten home when her husband sat her down and they hopped on Zoom,” said Russell. “We presented her with this incredible gift, and shared the backstory of how much work [her husband] put into it for her, with the ring coming all the way from Italy. It was a total celebratory moment with lots of happy tears.”

There’s no shortage of operational complexities that come with Russell’s job as the president and COO of the family business (this being a very “2020” example), but the mission is simple: build strong and long lasting relationships.

“I oversee all the tasks for the company, including sales, bookkeeping, in-store displays, and knowing how many gift bags or rolls of toilet paper we have left,” said Russell. “But the relationships are our foundation, and I will always hold onto that.”

Strong relationships in this jewelry business are built from the inside out, and have long been grounded in the Adams family since 1922 when Russell’s grandfather began. Today, Frank Adams Jewelers is a fourth generation family business, with Russell’s son Jeffrey now working alongside her and her father at the store.

“I’m extremely fortunate that my son has joined us,” said Russell. “He’s working with the staff and has tremendous respect for their knowledge, training and existing relationships with clients. It’s not easy being young and coming in with new ideas, but he knows what’s made us successful so far.”

As a steadfast brick-and-mortar shop, Frank Adams Jewelers has met face-to-face with clients inside its Stuyvesant Plaza storefront for the past 25 years, and despite the challenges faced by many traditional retailers, Russell says this business will remain physical far into the future.

“The thing with technology is that it changes very quickly,” said Russell. “Of course we’ve adapted to accommodate some e-commerce, but for us, technology is an addition to the services we provide, not a substitute.”

Video check-ins with clients have become part of the new routine, and so has using social media to identify new designers and trends; including a push for more sustainable, American made products made out of recycled materials or created by individual, independent artists.

“My 18-year-old twin daughters tell me what’s hip with the younger generation and often share ideas on what we should bring into the store,” Russell said. “Sometimes the attitude is that things are more disposable, but down the road it’s nice to have some items with sentiment. You’re always on trend when you wear jewelry that means something to you.”

When reflecting on foot traffic in the store during such a turbulent year, Russell says there’s been no shortage of special moments to celebrate, from engagements and anniversaries to graduations and birthdays. Russell has prepared dozens of clients for pandemic proposals and heard from former clients with exciting life updates to share. She recalls a recent Face-Time where she met a couple’s new puppy.

“During stressful times, people rely on their family and loved ones,” said Russell. “It reminds us what’s really important in life. People just want to be happy.”

And her industry helps people do that.

“To stay positive about life, people do things that make them feel as happy as they can in any situation. We all have a choice to make, and staying positive is the right choice.”